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CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2003

a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

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Report from the Directors

Steve "Roc" Bonchek, Co-Director

Of the three NSRF co-directors, I am the only one who wasn't involved in NSRF's national network before 1999. Up until then my exposure to NSRF was as the director of Harmony School. With 185 pre-k to 12th grade students and sixteen faculty, we had utilized and benefited from our CFG at Harmony since we started our first group in 1995. Consequently, when NSRF decided to leave Brown University and become part of Harmony I had only an inkling of NSRF's potential to touch tens of thousands of educators and millions of students.

All that has changed.

Since Harmony's founding in 1974 with four high school students, I had always hoped that we could serve as a catalyst for public school reform. The basic philosophy of Harmony had its origins in the "free school movement" of the late 1960s and early 1970s. That philosophy can best be summed up in the following statement:

Schools should be a place where all people are engaged in an authentic democratic community and together have meaningful and revealing dialogue that begins to formulate new dimensions of ourselves and of society.

Ron Miller, president of the Foundation for Educational Renewal which funded the first three issues of *Connections*, writes eloquently about this movement in his book *Free Schools, Free People,* available through SUNY Press (www.sunypress.edu).

When I started to experience the process of CFGs in 1995 it seemed very consistent with Harmony's philosophy. CFGs appeared to be the perfect group process within which people in schools could have this "meaningful and revealing dialogue." In the three years that

NSRF has been a part of Harmony, many more educators have come to agree with this conclusion.

Building on the work that went on at Brown University from 1995 to 2000, we have seen the budget of NSRF grow from $10,000 to $2,000,000, and through the work of 26 Centers of Activity, 8000 additional educators have attended NSRF Coaches Institutes. However, amidst all this activity, there are two NSRF initiatives that touch me "where I live(d)." You see, in my life I have only lived in two places —Bloomington, Indiana, and Cleveland, Ohio, and as an adult I have really had only one job—being at Harmony School.

The fact that NSRF work fit so naturally into Harmony School came as no surprise. However, to my great surprise, the largest single NSRF district project has emerged in my old hometown, Cleveland—within the Cleveland Municipal School District. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you what is going on in these two communities, Harmony and Cleveland, that are so close to my heart.

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published by the Harmony School Education Center

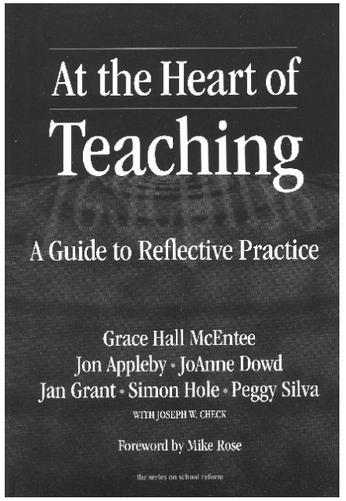
At the Heart of Teaching: A Guide to Reflective Practice

A Book Review – Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Whether you're facilitating a session for new coaches, attending a retreat with colleagues, or planning for your classroom and school in the fall, this new book by Educators Writing for Change is a must read! Authors Grace Hall McEntee, Jon Appleby, JoAnne Dowd, Jan Grant, Simon Hole and Peggy Silva draw us into their hearts and classrooms as they share their stories and their tools in the pages of this small book that speaks volumes for anyone working with students and families.

I was hooked from the start when JoAnne shared her desperation after returning from a conference to learn that her class had behaved horribly for the substitute teacher. JoAnne doesn't just share a sad story, she goes deeper and shares the process she used to unpack the problem with her kids. Her honest reflections about what worked, and what did not, in "Changing the Blame Game" will be useful for anyone who has ever wondered how their classroom community became a chaotic circus in their absence.

Jan Grant's chapter on "Examining Students at Work" spoke to students' needs for authentic purpose and their innate desire to celebrate their learning. I was transported into her school's cafeteria as I read about students "Coming from Truth" and their demonstration of the depth of their understanding in "The Focus Question" protocol.



"Student Centered Meetings: A Protocol for Working with Families" by Peggy Silva gave me new ideas and energy for my work with colleagues around the possibilities for greater student voice and family engagement.

I was moved by the honesty of Simon's approach as he described the way that he and his colleagues move beyond congeniality through the "Art of Reflective Conversations" with their stories. "Learning to listen to our little voices," and use reflective tools with our colleagues and kids will press us beyond the latest lunchroom laments. Simon reminds us that "telling our stories is hard…but worth the effort."

Grace and Simon share two other approaches for reflection, one for times when we're on our own, and one for use with a group. Depending on our preference or our circumstances, either should help us peel back the layers that can obscure our vision when things aren't going as planned.

In the context of holding Socratic Discussions with students, Jon writes of the dilemma we face as we work to empower our kids to take ownership for their learning. This resonated with me. While it may never get easier as we work to empower our students, Jon's sharing will help us embrace the ambiguity together.

The book is rounded out by discussions of Critical Friends Groups in action and the value of Mini Retreats, complete with suggested protocols and writing activities for all of us to use as we continue to "polish the stone" of our work as reflective practitioners.

With a little help from our friends and their stories, I'm looking forward to a summer of renewed learning, and I hope you'll join us. ■

You can purchase At the Heart of Teaching: A Guide to Reflective Practice *at www.tcpress.com*

Connections encourages anyone who reads/uses the ideas in this book to share their experiences in our online conversations and in future pages of this publication.

Debbie Bambino can be reached at <dbambino@earthlink.net>

NSRF Mission Statement

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

CONNECTIONS is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year by the Harmony School Education Center, it provides a forum for CFG coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

Editors — Debbie Bambino & Katy Kelly

Layout & Design — Sarah Childers, Camellia Cosgray

Our special thanks goes to the Foundation for Educational Renewal for its support of this journal.

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to *Connections* contact us at 812/330.2702, <kkelly@harmonyschool.org>, <dbambino@earthlink.net>

NSRF Summer Leadership Seminar on Equity

Sunday, August 3 — Thursday, August 7, 2003 in Denver, Colorado

What will the Seminar do?
The Summer Leadership Seminar will provide intellectual and emotional support to those who are actively working for equity through the positive transformation of educational settings. It will be facilitated by Nancy Mohr, NSRF New York, and Victor Cary, BayCES, Oakland, California.

We seek to:

A. Build a community of caring, skilled leaders committed to bring about equity in their schools
B. Build the capacity of leaders to lead and facilitate meaningful professional development to increase equity at their school sites and in their communities

Logistics

Registration cost
$1000 (includes materials, dinner on Sunday, and breakfast and lunch Monday through Thursday)

Meeting Location
Grant-Humphreys Mansion— 770 Pennsylvania, Denver, CO
www.coloradohistory.org/ghm/rentalsGrantHum.htm

Hotel
The Burnsley— 1000 Grant Street, Denver, CO
Cost— $119/night
www.burnsley.com

For more information and to register go to:
www.nsrfharmony.org/equity_institute.html

What will happen at the Seminar?
Participants will have the opportunity to reflect deeply on issues of equity as they have played out in their own lives and in the lives of their students and families; to learn about and discuss strategies for creating democratic and equitable school communities; and to be supported in their leadership.

The focus of this seminar will be on issues to do with race—and will be both theoretical and personal. The idea is that rather than figure out which equity issue to address, we pick one—race being an important and serious choice—in order to really concentrate on it, and then will talk about how the same tools and structures we use can be applied to all other constructs and to local settings.

Who should consider attending?
This seminar is designed for people who see themselves (or would like to see themselves) as leaders for equity – defined as people who take responsibility for what matters to them. This might be people who are currently taking leadership in their local context OR people who would like to do so. It is *strongly* encouraged that participants attend in pairs or teams that are diverse by: race, gender, and role in school (i.e., teacher, administrator, counselor, etc.). In order to build a diverse team, you may want to consider staff that is not currently in formal leadership positions. ■

The Seminar IS:	The Seminar IS NOT:
A networking and learning opportunity for leaders committed to equity	A conference
An opportunity to deepen our own understanding and share our thinking and experiences	A place where outside experts will give us the answers
A place to learn strategies, structures, and processes for supporting equity work at our school sites	A place to find a packaged solution
An opportunity to experience and learn about the necessary infrastructure for addressing equity in depth	A quick fix
A place where structures will be provided for people to deal constructively with their feelings about race, class, gender and other forms of bias	A place where difficult issues will be avoided

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and Matt Dunne have all, at one time or another, shared their thinking with us.

We also always facilitate our own work. CFG coaches, as well as local and national NSRF facilitators, lead home groups, workshops, coaches clinics, protocol sessions, open space sessions, and text-based conversations. Some facilitators are more experienced than others with designing and facilitating this kind of work, but the Winter Meeting gives us all an opportunity to "cross pollinate" — as people from different parts of the country work with each other — as well as an opportunity to try new things. With honest feedback, we all grow as we learn together.

Dr. Terry Tafoya

Sometimes we try something new. Terry Tafoya captivated us with his stories, his drumming, his humor, and his wisdom this past year. One memorable year we sang. JoAnne Dowd convinced us that we could create our own lyrics—on the spot—to This Land is Your Land, and we did, led by the spirited fiddle playing of Emily Buckhannon. One year, Markie Hancock, a former CFG coach and teacher from Chicago turned NYC film producer, created a documentary of the Winter Meeting as it was happening, NSRF Goes South, and we showed it at the closing. In 1998, we premiered our video, Making Teaching Public, at the Winter Meeting, and wildly applauded Neville Brown and Christelle Estrada, two CFG coaches from Pasadena High School, who were featured in the video and who were with us at the meeting.

And always, we learn—with and from each other. I go to NSRF's Winter Meeting each year to be challenged and stretched, to be reinvigorated, and to publicly recommit to the work I am doing — with young people and with my colleagues. I go because of the people I know will be there, and I look forward to seeing old friends, and meeting new ones. I go each year with the faces of my CFG members in my head, and leave with a wealth of new ideas and resources.

In January 2000, at our Winter Meeting in Los Angeles, we moved NSRF from the Annenberg Institute to the Harmony School Education Center in a Friday evening ceremony. We didn't know what the future of NSRF would be. I think it was telling, however, that the first decision the Governance Council made, the day after the 2000 Winter Meeting, was that we would continue to gather someplace, every winter, to share our stories and to learn together. Pete Bermudez and his colleagues stepped forward and said, "Come to Miami next year." And we did. The rest, as they say, is history. We haven't missed a year.

Next January 2004, from the 15th to the 17th, we will gather in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We hope you will join us. Our learning will be richer because you are there. ■

Gene Thompson-Grove is a Co-Director of NSRF. She can be contacted at <gthompsongrove@earthlink.net>

Camellia Cosgray and Mary Mitchell

8th Annual
NSRF Winter Meeting

Equitable Leadership: Building Leadership Capacity for All

January 15 - 17 2004

Philadelphia Marriott
1201 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Register on-line on or after July 9th

www.nsrfharmony.org/wintermeeting.html

New Teacher Inductions

Jim Hontz, Colorado

I'll never forget the scene. As the new district induction coordinator for the Roaring Fork School District, I surveyed the faces of the fifty or so rookie teachers on that first day in August two years ago. I could see it all in their eyes: idealism, fear, energy, naiveté, anxious expectation, and, when I handed out their packet of induction requirements, palpable shock, with perhaps a touch of loathing. I was the headlights and they were the herd huddled on the center stripe. I swear no one blinked for twenty minutes.

As supervisor to many student teachers through the years and as a frequent mentor for new teachers, I had heard it all, and most of it began and ended with the same primal yelp —Aarrgghh! Meetings! Time? Theory? What do I do about the mother who blames me for her son's D? I have a homecoming float to build! How can I convince my class that I'm concerned about hurtful remarks to each other? Are my expectations for this *Hamlet* assessment realistic and rigorous enough? I need to clean Marcy's lunch off my shoe! I think this stack of papers is from last semester! How do I get that angry student to feel better and be more productive?

Reality, not theory.

This was the fate of the trembling masses before me.

It occurred to me that such practical concerns had been the subject of countless conversations in my school's Critical Friends meetings since 1995. So, as a long-time CFG coach, my first proposal was to divide all of the new teachers into site-based induction groups. Numbers for each group would vary from 5 to 9. We would meet four times a year away from school. Meetings would be three hours long with a good meal as intermission. Each inductee would have at least one opportunity to present an issue or dilemma directly related to his or her school venue. We would help each other with our day-to-day work and offer insights. When possible we would invite veteran teachers and mentors to contribute their wisdom.

Hmm…it walks like a duck... Although I didn't call them CFGs, they were indeed the same collaborative entity that my school CFG and several others in the district had grown to anticipate and enjoy through the years.

Now, two years later, Consultancies continue to be the staple protocol for new teachers encountering challenging situations for the first time. The notion that one must have years of experience to offer insights has no foundation in these meetings. Marie Voss Patterson, third grade teacher at Carbondale Elementary School, says, "Stepping back, talking about a problem, listening to other cohorts has made a huge difference in minor and major problems. I actually enjoyed our meetings and believe every teacher should have such a strong support group."

These valuable peer collaborations, combined with a required journal, peer observations, and my visitations at their request (frequently generated at a meeting), possess a facet of Critical Friends that is so essential: reflection.

Such meetings raise important questions for inexperienced teachers. One such concern comes from Susan Stockhouse, a seventh grade math teacher at Glenwood Springs Middle School: "Do I have the energy it takes to allow each student to feel special, wanted, and taught? Coming in with no background in classroom teaching, am I truly a fit?" More experienced teachers would do well to engage in such ongoing self-evaluation.

Occasionally a teacher will get valuable feedback on a unit or lesson plan. When Ted Frisbee, a teacher at Carbondale Community School, presented a geographically localized adaptation of Monopoly in his social studies class, he was unsure of the quality and relevance of the creative exercise. He said, "The [tuning] protocol was great, and I loved the way we…allow for both my reflection and the presentation of my lesson… Offering 'warm' and 'cool' comments was extremely helpful."

Our final meetings have focused on individual successes rather than the traditional dilemmas so frequent for new teachers. We "tweaked" the Success Protocol into a briefer "Success Charrette" to accommodate each member. Physical education teacher Darcy Kyle's thoughts are typical of the upbeat mood: "I liked talking about successes and reflecting on how and why something works and how it can be used in other areas of our teaching."

In a profession in which we have the tendency to devour our young, here is yet another way for the Critical Friends model to serve us. And for impressionable, vital new teachers with staggering potential, this collaboration can have a lasting effect. Just last evening I read a reflection that has far-reaching implications: "I'm really excited about next year, and I'm looking forward to applying all of my new-found knowledge. I wonder — is there some kind of support base set up for second year teachers? Or third? Or fourth…?"

The deer are safe in the field now, happily blinking and grazing. ■

Contact Jim Hontz at <jhontz@rfsd.k12.co.us>

Eddying Out: Helping Your CFG Share Ownership of Planning and Leadership

Jay Davis, New Hampshire

In whitewater paddling and rafting, eddies are marvelous places. Calm spots of water just below rocks or bends in the river, they offer blessed relief from the often chaotic and turbulent currents and waves to the paddler who "eddies out." More importantly, they provide the essential opportunity to take stock, check equipment, scan the churning water ahead, and plan the "best line" accordingly. An eddy is never a final destination, but often a crucial step to reaching that destination.

Neither are CFGs ever really our destination (as all of our work is ultimately focused on improving student understanding and performance) but instead an essential, and at times delightful, means towards reaching that end. Most CFG participants have experienced that wonder of finding calmer water together, removed from the schedule/paperwork/madding crowd

> *An eddy is never a final destination, but often a crucial step to reaching that destination.*

of the school day. Indeed, this time "away" is precisely what allows us to re-enter the daily chaos of our professional lives with new purpose, skill and support.

But CFG time, too, can develop its own sense of turbulence and chaos. Particularly for coaches, stress can build as agendas need to be developed, group members tracked down for pre-protocol conferences, time managed in a way that involves all group members but allows for individuals' needs. For some groups, the best intentions to plan collaboratively and have no internal hierarchy run headlong into the reality of busy professional lives, and the coach becomes the default—planner. The coach feels the pressure to make meetings productive, and the group loses the powerful advantage of the collaborative process. A need emerges to create an eddy within an eddy, to find time where individuals and the group as a whole can take a broader perspective on the work they plan to do together; CFG work, too, can use some time to eddy out.

With my own group, we decided to address this need this past fall. After some consideration of what exactly it was that we wanted as a group, we decided on the following desired outcomes: 1) some overall picture of what we hoped to accomplish as a group this year, 2) a shared sense of ownership/responsibility for future meetings, and 3) an opportunity to collaboratively identify our own individual goals for the year.

To meet these three goals, I developed the following structure. At the beginning of the meeting, I made three columns on the whiteboard: "individual work we want to bring to the group", "topics we would like the group to read about and discuss", and "school-wide issues for the group to discuss." We wrote in our individual notebooks for ten minutes, brainstorming in each category. Then, in triads, people shared their lists with others, while in the process winnowing out our most important items in each category.

For the next step, we brought our individual lists to the whiteboard and wrote in one item under each category. After looking at the final list of items on the board, we each used a marker to put a dot next to our two preferred choices in the "reading" and "school issue" categories, identifying the two topics in each list that we were most interested in addressing as a group. (These could include the topics we put up ourselves, but did not need to if we saw others that now appealed to us more.) No marks were made in the "Individual Work" category.

As a last step, we posted our schedule of meetings for the year on the board, with one or two blanks left open next to each meeting, depending on the meeting's length. We then went around the group, "signing up" for meeting

slots. As each individual's turn came, they could either sign up to bring their own individual work (a choice kept sacred by no voting on the board) or to take responsibility for presenting one of the issues, or finding an appropriate reading in the other categories. For those choosing from the non-individual categories, selections invariably reflected the group's preferences as shown by the dots.

Five slots were intentionally left open for different times of the year, and we also decided that anyone with a pressing need (a student whose work plummeted, an upcoming assignment that suddenly needed adaptation, a school-board decision with unexpected ramifications) could ask to be scheduled for the next meeting as necessary.

In the months since that meeting —months of exhilarating and draining negotiating of our school's and students' various currents and waves —the benefits of periodic eddying out as a group are clear. As coach I feel less on the spot for needing to plan month to month. Far more importantly, though, the group shares an authentic ownership for what we are doing, and also knows that the topics being addressed are the ones that need to be. We have taken the time to slip out of the current for a bit of perspective—the chance to sit in the eddy and look at where we need to go, individually and collectively as a group. Such perspective is well worth the time. ■

Contact Jay Davis at <jay.davis@dartmouth.edu>

Small Schools…

(continued from page 15)

teaching and learning, as well as how the implementation of their plans may result in less than desired outcomes. Each school has become a more reflective school culture as a result of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation and OHSTI.

It has been an honor to be a part of this initiative. I have met and worked with some very caring, astute and insightful educators in Ohio public high schools, and I have formed collaborative relationships with a lot of the KnowledgeWorks staff. In addition, There are several NSRF members (Lois Butler, Marcy Raymond, Steven Strull, Nancy Sutton, Dyanne Alexander) with whom I have had the pleasure of continued and continuous collaboration. Whether or not a school is selected by KnowledgeWorks to engage in the deep planning year followed by the September 2004 opening as 2, 3, or 4 small autonomous high schools, I know that all schools involved will have benefited from this long and arduous journey.

The journey also has been extremely painful. It is not easy as a school community to document and provide evidence to support the low levels of performance on every indicator for school success. Most schools know they are not meeting the needs of all of their students, and they are not used to emerging themselves in a deep analysis of their current reality. They know they are failing because they are being told they are not doing well. The lack of success is documented and appears in numerous newspaper articles. It is a different dynamic and the potential for transformation is more intense when you have to create and document your current reality of failure. KnowledgeWorks had schools inform themselves of their low levels of performance. Now that this initial period of intense introspection is over, not one school can continue to do business as usual. With or without further assistance from KnowledgeWorks, with or without continued funding from the foundations, these large, mostly urban, high schools will continue to do things differently so that more students can succeed. ■

To find out more about the KnowledgeWorks Foundation Ohio High School Transformation Initiative please visit the web site: www.kwfdn.org

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Ridge Arts Actors…

(continued from page 11)

they hone their skills. Beautiful wood carvings are everywhere, and in a place of honor is the work of students. Learning is natural and celebrated… Until the Priests of Logic and Science arrive, sent by the King to see if people were really good at woodcrafting. Their theory is that if one were to break woodcrafting into basic skills, it could be more easily taught and mastered. Once identified, teachers are mandated to teach only these skills, focusing on only one skill at a time. Students are told to forget "making things," and to hammer, hammer, hammer. Pretty soon, the bent nails from hammering drills pile up, and no one is too interested in classes. Everyone is blamed — the hammer-impaired students, the parents who weren't providing drill time at home, but mostly the teachers who could not follow simple directions. Because the schools are now falling apart, it is decreed that students would be tested, and compared with students from nearby towns. (The only happy people at this point are the people who make nails!) The masters, who can no longer find joy in their work, leave the town…

After sharing the story with my students, they asked, "Is this about FCAT?" I knew we had the right piece. We adapted it for the stage, looking for the "actable moments." We even found wonderful wood carvings done by our shop teacher (a member of the Woodturning Guild of Miami) to use as props.

To close the show, the character Mary (a little girl who once loved to carve and is now drowning in hammering drills) comes to the mike, looks out at the audience and says: "It's too late for Woodcrafters' City, but it's not too late for us. You're the principals, you can make a difference… you can be our heroes." Then angel-voiced Juliana sings, "Hero." I was not crying alone this time.

One of the principals commented that we should send this tape to congress for viewing before any other legislation is passed.

These students will always have the memory of being heard by a roomful of adults who really cared what they had to say. Frequently, students view education as something that is done *to* them, not necessarily *for* them in any way they value. The idea that *they* were taking a stance about their education in a very public forum is an experience they will carry with them forever.

And for that, I am forever grateful to everyone who made it possible. ■

Linda Emm is a teacher at Cutler Ridge Middle School in Miami, Florida. She can be reached at <emm@crms.dade.k12.fl.us>

At Harmony we have three CFGs made up of teachers and staff, one Coaches CFG that includes coaches from Harmony School, Indiana University, and the Indiana Department of Education, and one CFG made up of faculty, students, parents, and community members. The effects of CFG work on the Harmony culture have been profound. The first thing that I noticed as director was the expanded level of teacher leadership that I observed in faculty meetings. This from a faculty that was already empowered to make all curricular and budgetary decisions.

However, even within this engaged faculty of 16, there was a gap between people who took on more leadership and responsibility and those who did not. I believe because of CFG work we experienced an increase in teacher and staff self-confidence and a higher comfort level with their own abilities. The workloads at the school are now more equally distributed among all of us and there is clearly a higher collective capacity for leadership. This has been significant for me as more and more of my time is involved with national NSRF issues.

> *The effects of CFG work on the Harmony culture have been profound.*

The effect this has had on the Harmony students can be seen in our classes. Teachers are taking more risks by making their work more public, trying out new curriculum ideas that have been tuned in CFGs, and CFG strategies are utilized routinely. Harmony faculty meetings and program level family meetings (our decision making meetings that involve students and teachers working together to address program level issues) are much more efficient, and teacher and student satisfaction with these meetings has risen. The use of the Descriptive Review process has also provided a great boost to our ability to reflect on and design implementation strategies to support many of our neediest students and their families.

The Cleveland work began when NSRF National Facilitator Dave Lehman, from the Alternative Community School in Ithaca, NY, and I met with a Cleveland team that was working on a Gates Foundation project that planned to start a new small school in Cleveland. As part of this work, Dave and I introduced the notion of CFGs. Two Assistant Superintendents on the Cleveland team became so excited about what CFGs could contribute that they asked us to begin discussions with their Director of Professional Development about training two coaches in each of Cleveland's eighty-nine elementary schools.

The results of that meeting and ensuing conversations have led to a brand new small school in Cleveland—Success Tech Academy—and the widespread use of CFGs throughout many of Cleveland's elementary and middle schools. The small school work was facilitated by monthly visits from Philadelphia NSRF Facilitator Debbie Bambino. Debbie's work there over the course of nearly 14 months resulted in the opening of the school last September. The training of over 200 coaches has been facilitated by a team of 20 NSRF National Facilitators who have been making monthly visits to Cleveland since November, 2001.

Members of this national team come from Ohio, Florida, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Georgia, Oregon, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. Amazingly, even with the brutal Cleveland winter, they never missed a day that they had committed to be there. The NSRF team has made monthly visits to Cleveland over the last sixteen months, and though I have only been there three of those days, each time I have had the opportunity to participate in sessions and talk to many Cleveland coaches and district leaders.

The main thing that stands out for me about the Cleveland work is how the NSRF team has been able to instill a sense of hopefulness into a group of over 200 educators in a fairly typical urban district and, even more importantly, provide them with some "tools" to actualize that new-found optimism. This year, NSRF Facilitators Pete Bermudez, from Florida, and Connie Chene, from New Mexico, have facilitated a Cleveland Principals' CFG with 13 elementary and middle school principals. They hope to expand on that group next year, as the leadership in Cleveland has come to understand how pivotal principal support and understanding of CFG work is to their ultimate success. Next year we also hope to expand our work to high schools and to begin apprenticing some Cleveland coaches with the NSRF National Facilitation Team.

The presence of the kind of "authentic community" I referred to earlier is apparent in both Cleveland and Harmony NSRF work. In Cleveland, the manner in which some twenty NSRF facilitators have been able to come together, whether or not they were previously acquainted, and immediately find a common language and set of experiences upon which to build, has said volumes about the authentic community that runs throughout NSRF. We certainly want to build upon that sense of community in the future as more and more educators get involved with NSRF.

As we grow, the challenge of maintaining the sense of community that I have known at Harmony for nearly 30 years and have now found within NSRF is both daunting and exciting. I believe that with the creativity, commitment, and powerful minds that permeate the NSRF network, we are up to this challenge. ■

Steve Bonchek can be contacted at <harmony@indiana.edu>

Small Schools: Ohio High School Transformation Initiative

Camilla Greene, New Jersey

When I first heard about the KnowledgeWorks Foundation's Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), I was intrigued, hopeful, and eager to be a part of this initiative that is unlike any other high school transformation initiative. The key elements of the OHSTI that appeal to me are

- the 15 Non-Negotiables
- the ongoing modeling of supportive and equitable relationship building through the community engagement practices
- the collaborative relationship building and support built into the program for the high schools and the school coaches.

Overall the common thread of this work of transforming large, urban high schools into small schools is the importance of structuring, and restructuring positive relationships aimed at increasing student achievement.

The 15 Non-Negotiables (see sidebar), which are a major part of the OHSTI, made it evident to me that the KnowledgeWorks Foundation had knowledge about, studied, and looked at other high school transformation models and learned from their mistakes. The 15 Non-Negotiables made crystal clear the level of support, commitment, and innovation expected from all of the stakeholders in order to provide an academically rich, student centered, and standards based educational environment. Positive and supportive relationships are recognized as a key ingredient for success for high school students in low performing, mostly urban districts. Going one step further, KnowledgeWorks required school districts to sign documents agreeing to abide by the 15 Non-Negotiables in order to be a part of the OHSTI and these 17 school districts are publicly held accountable for supporting the high schools' transformations into small schools. There are no hidden agendas, and ongoing support is built into all the levels of engagement.

The OHSTI is collaboration among several foundations: the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Other funding sources include: The US Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Education. 41 high schools in 17 Ohio school districts accepted the challenge to begin the transformation to small high schools. This challenge includes a pre-planning year, a deep planning year and two implementation years. This first year each school had to incorporate the language and intent of the 15 Non-Negotiables in their school portfolio. One of the Non-Negotiables is that the high schools must form small high schools of no more than 400 students. Another noteworthy Non-Negotiable is the level to which OHSTI requires the community of each school to be engaged in the transformation process from the very beginning. The involvement of the school community and all of the stakeholders must continue in the creation, implementation, and ongoing evaluations phases of each small school.

The Harwood Institute has partnered with the KnowledgeWorks Foundation to help districts involve their communities. Each district has selected a community organization referred to as a "Center of Strength." Each Center of Strength is required to meet with members of the community in groups of 8 to 10 people over a period of time. As a result of these meetings large segments of each of the 41 school communities Ohio involved in the KnowledgeWorks High School Initiative were asked a series of questions, such as what they value about teaching and learning, what they want their students to know and be able to do, and what they know about small high schools. Then each Center of Strength compiled the community responses and presented them to each high school design team to incorporate in its school portfolio. In addition, the Harwood Institute brings the community stakeholders together several times during the year to share strategies and design new platforms and arenas for community engagement.

The OHSTI is a very complex and comprehensive plan with many levels of engagement. While the Centers of Strength were actively engaging the school communities in the transformation initiative, each of the 41 Ohio high schools were engaged in a rigorous process of identifying their current reality, and creating a narrative vision of how they would be transformed into small, autonomous high schools centered on individual students' successes. Each high school then wrote a strategic plan to chart how they were going to go from their current reality into 2, 3 or 4 highly successful and academically challenging small high schools opening September 2004. Each high school put together a school portfolio which contained detailed descriptions of their current reality along with their narrative vision and strategic plan for transformation.

KnowledgeWorks provided a school coach for each of the 41 high schools in the transformation initiative. Each school coach worked closely and collaboratively with the district and the school to help create a school portfolio. These school portfolios were modeled on Victoria Bernhardt's "The School Portfolio Tool Kit" series. Dr. Bernhardt has constructed the 7 rubrics of continu-

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Winter Meeting Review

Gene Thompson-Grove, Co-Director, Massachussetts

What do Chicago, Providence, Waltham, Santa Monica, Boston, Atlanta, Miami, Houston and L.A. all have in common? If you guessed that these cities have all been sites for NSRF's annual Winter Meeting, you would be right!

We held our first CFG Coaches/ Principals Winter Meeting in December 1995 in Chicago. The previous summer, 94 coaches had been "trained" in one of four 6-day seminars in Providence, San Francisco, and Wisconsin. 91 out of that 94 showed up in Chicago that December. We were all struggling with implementing our very first CFGs, and we were desperate (or so it seemed) to talk to our colleagues from the summer. What were they doing that worked? How did they know it was working? What were their struggles?

Consultancies on the terrace

That first year, we presented Consultancy dilemmas about our work as CFG coaches. We read a common text and discussed it, and we listened to a panel of our colleagues talk about their learning. We looked at our own students' work in home groups, and we even formed a 91-person continuum in the ballroom around issues of standards and CFG portfolios. Little did we know at the time, but a pattern — now familiar — had been established for NSRF's Winter Meetings.

World Café

Our work at the Winter Meetings has changed some each year — depending on the needs of the people who attend, and on our learning from previous years. One year, we tried regional Winter Meetings, but people yearned for a national meeting, so we went back. Home groups used to be the place where you saw the people from your summer institute session, but as our numbers grew and people had to pay their own way, we began to form heterogeneous home groups, and began experimenting with role-alike groups. The Atlanta meeting in 1997 was the first meeting at which we tried Open Space — one day and 32 sessions later, 400 people declared it a success. The popular "coaches clinics" of this past year's meeting were actually first tried in Boston in 1998 — we called them workshops, and we didn't know as much as we do now, so we said they were just okay, and abandoned that format. We keep growing as we learn more, and sometimes we find ourselves circling back. The World Café from last January may someday find its way back into one of our meetings as we learn more about how to use it well.

And our work has remained the same. We always read something together — the more provocative the better. In doing this, we acknowledge that if we are to construct our own learning, we must periodically introduce new ideas into the mix, as well as challenge our old assumptions. Sometimes the writer of the article or chapter we are reading comes and provokes us further; Carl Glickman, Patricia Wasley, Gloria Ladsen-Billings, Tony Alvarado, and Rob Evans have all joined us at our National Meetings. Some years, our colleagues are our keynote speakers; Paula Evans, Kevin Horton, Teri Schrader, Khadijah Abdul-Aleem, Larry Myatt,

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Small Schools...

(continued from page 5)

ous improvement to guide schools as they take stock of their effectiveness as a school in each of the following areas:

- Leadership
- Student Achievement
- Continuous Improvement
- Information and Analysis
- Partnership Development
- Quality Planning
- Professional Development.

The schools used the 7 rubrics to chart their current reality and plan their future success. The school portfolio provided an accurate picture of the school's current reality, presented the school's qualitative and quantitative data as support and evidence for their self assessment rating on each of the 7 rubrics, included a rationale for their ratings; and proposed a strategic plan for how they are to improve in their small schools. Also included in the school portfolio was a narrative of their goals for students, their vision for small high schools based on their students' needs and their school community's beliefs, values and vision. All of the 41 Ohio high schools have engaged their parents, students and staff in this self-evaluation process and in the construction of their school portfolio.

I work with two high schools in the Columbus, Ohio school district. I and 18 other School Improvement Coaches work with Marcy Raymond, who is the School Design Manager. Our collaboration as school coaches is part of our work, and one of the reasons I am willing to travel from Connecticut to Ohio on a regular basis to work with KnowledgeWorks and my NSRF colleagues. In my two high schools I work with teachers, principals, students, parents, and community members on an ongoing basis as they work to create, submit, improve and resubmit their comprehensive school portfolio. Much of our work together is centered on discussions about what is it we value, and our beliefs about teaching and learning. We ask ourselves how we can create small schools that reflect the best of our values, beliefs about our children and our schools, and what do we know about how our students learn. Our school portfolios are manifestations of those beliefs and values. The school portfolios were delivered to KnowledgeWorks in Cincinnati, Ohio on April 21, 2003. All 41 high schools submitted their portfolio on time. This was not an easy task for these high schools because they were meeting the challenges of the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative while in full operation.

OHSTI is a five year initiative. Of the 41 high schools in 17 Ohio school districts who have submitted their school portfolios to KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 8 high schools in 6 districts were selected to move to be early implementation schools. The selection process was based on three dynamics:

- the strength of the school portfolio- a portfolio that demonstrates and reflects a passion for what effective, small schools can do for students
- the school's participations in KnowledgeWorks events aimed at strengthening school personnel's ability to transform
- the school's presentation of their portfolio.

Those high schools that did not make the May selection to transform into small schools have received feedback on their portfolios, and they are eligible to resubmit their improved portfolios in August, 2003.

After a school is selected, it will move to the second phase of the Initiative. This second phase is referred to as the "deep" planning year. The deep planning year 2003-2004 will engage community leaders, school leaders and educators in defining the human, philosophical, physical structures and designs of each small school following the small outlined vision and strategic plans in its portfolio. Leaders for each small school will be chosen, autonomous budgets for each school created, and the standards based curriculum will be designed. The small schools will open September, 2004. It is the intent of KnowledgeWorks to continue to work with the high schools that have been a part of this initiative even if they are not selected to implement small learning communities for their students.

Every high school involved has reported that they have been positively affected by this initiative. They believe that they are better at being able to use their data to improve student learning, more reflective, have gained insights into their approaches to certain dynamics of

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The 15 Non-Negotiables

- Autonomous governance, budgets, structures, and staffing; flexible use of resources
- Distributed leadership
- Open access and choice for students
- Indentification of and release time for principal in first year of implementation
- Professional development that clearly links changes in teaching practice to improved student achievement
- A clearly-defined system of central office support of small school design and implementation
- A curriculum clearly aligned with state standards and focused on helping students use their minds well
- Non-traditional scheduling that promotes deep student learning and meaningful relationships with teachers
- Clearly demonstrated use of technology and advanced communication resources
- Clearly stated benchmarks for improved student achievement
- Performance assessment for students
- Authentic community engagement as defined by substantive community conversations that engage a broad array of stakeholders, and connect with and influence official decisions
- Clear community involvement in the daily life of the school
- Individual teacher advisors for each student
- Target maximum population of 400 students

NSRF Chattanooga, Tennessee

Center of Activity Report, Marcy O'Neill, Tennessee

Being at an assistant principal CFG meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee is like being a thirsty camel at a big oasis! Each month, around 17 busy assistant principals get together and spend some time focusing on the 'real' work that we as administrators should do each day.

This year, the Assistant Principal CFG in Chattanooga centered on ways to raise student achievement through supporting teachers in our buildings. We decided to focus on how to help raise teacher expectations of student achievement. We started the process with a text-based discussion using an article about highly effective teachers titled "Teacher Effectiveness: Improving Instruction One Classroom at a Time" by James H. Stronge from the College of William and Mary.

We then went back to our buildings and looked for folks in whom we could identify some of the characteristics that we discussed from the article. We met the next month and did a success analysis protocol and developed a list of qualities that our own highly effective teachers possessed. We looked at the list and teased out the qualities to which we, as assistant principals, could lend support. The qualities on our current working list are: organization, planning, modeling, teaching strategies, time for reflection, effective procedures and routines, and high expectations. We intend to look at this list and focus on these issues in our buildings to encourage all teachers to expect the most that they can from our students.

As colleagues, we enjoy the increased trust and communication that we have developed this year as a result of doing the hard work of a CFG. It is a wonderful thing to be able to speak honestly and know that you are supported and encouraged to be successful. ■

The Public Education Foundation is a local, independent, nonprofit foundation whose mission is to help all Hamilton County students to be successful in school. Since 1988, the PEF has provided expertise, leadership and financial support to build a strong foundation for the students in the public schools.

For more information visit the PEF website, www.pefchattanooga.org.

Contact Marcy O'Neill at <mto@pefchattanooga.org>

In the Next Issue

Connections will focus on gender issues in schools in our Fall 2003 issue. If you are interested in submitting a piece, particularly student work, please contact Katy Kelly at <kkelly@harmonyschool.org> or Debbie Bambino at <dbambino@earthlink.net>

Scott Murphy is writing a feature on the Future(s) Protocol, which he authored. If you have used it he is interested in hearing your feedback. You can contact him at <smurphy@jeffco.k12.co.us>

See our website for submission guidelines, www.nsrfharmony.org/connections_guidelines.html or contact Katy Kelly at <kkelly@harmonyschool.org> if you have any questions or comments.

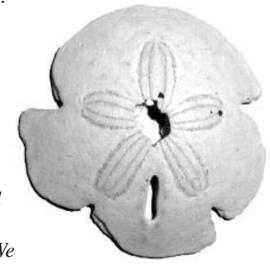
Lidia Gazdysyzn (left) and Scott Murphy (center)

Winter Meeting 2003 Reflections

We at the National Center were eager to hear the opinions and experiences of Winter Meeting 2003 participants. When we unpacked after our trip to Los Angeles and sat down to read the Reflections Sheets, we were rewarded with thoughtfulness, insight, humor and honesty. Reflections have, for us. always been a useful tool for improving our work and learning from our experiences, and that certainly proved true in this case. Here is a sample of some of the reflections that spoke to us.

The power of professional learning communities depends on practice and trust and a common goal of improving student achievement. It is always good to have the refresher, which NSRF offers.

I really think this winter conference is a good way to connect with other coaches, especially those who have been in a group longer. They have shown us newer coaches how the ebb and flow can be established. I was amazed how we were on the same wavelength and spoke the same language. So positive, so refreshing, so reflective of the capabilities of interacting with other colleagues. I want NSRF to know that their work is of enormous value – thanks!



Quote for the day: A: "That article riles me up; I don't even want to talk about it." B: "Then I think you should talk about it; you will have something valuable to share." A: "I choose to be silent." B: "Let me know how it goes." (Re: An Academic Standoff: Literacy Task Preferences of African-American and Mexican-American Male Adolescents vs. Teacher Expected Preferences, by Carolyn Orange and Rosalind Horowitz)

What a powerful way of starting this conference with a speaker like Terry Tafoya! He had so many insights that opened my mind and heart to the importance of the work we are undertaking. Life is all about making connections and we make connections by telling our stories. We need to tell our stories to our students and allow them to tell their own stories. CFGs allow us as educators an opportunity to make connections with other educators and hear each other in order to grow in our profession.

Dr. Tafoya was an amazing speaker. I'm excited to share his work with others and thankful to have been introduced to his work.

The success protocol was a great stimulator – success breeds success and we pass our enthusiasm on to each other

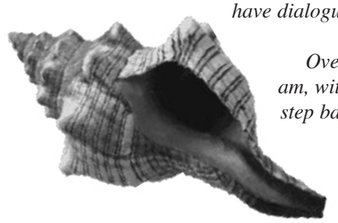
I loved the World Café. It felt like the structure totally melted typical communication barriers, largely through the use of forcing people to be physically proximal, and by creating an environment of intimacy. Very interesting to see all the different directions the conversations went.

I really enjoyed the opportunity to have "clinics". I felt the range and type of offerings was perfect

Today, I went to the 3-hour coaches clinic "Descriptive Review of a Child." I felt it was a very extensive analysis. A lot of what was discussed would be very useful in my own classroom. Much of which was dissected really struck and helped me reflect on my own practice.

This was a very fulfilling journey. It began with a bang! And ended the same way. How can we ever be the same after hands and hearts have connected? Looking forward to next winter meeting.

Before I forget: I wanted to mention that one of the most valuable parts of this WM is the opportunity to interact and have dialogue with people from backgrounds and cultures and ethnicities different from my own.



Overall this training has been a wonderful time for me to step back and remember who I am, within the larger web of our community, our culture, our world. I love the opportunity to step back inside myself away from the demands of everyday life.

It's great being able to [have] time to indulge in the luxury of feeding my soul. ■

NSRF's Living History
A Conversation with Nancy Mohr and Alan Dichter

Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

When asked about the evolution of the National School Reform Faculty, Nancy Mohr laughed. "Gene Thompson-Grove has always said that the organization started at our kitchen table, while others recall a conversation in a basement room of a Chicago hotel, but the roots of this organization are deeply embedded in the work of the Coalition of Essential Schools and The Annenberg Institute for School Reform." Nancy, the Director of NSRF New York, and her husband Alan Dichter, Local Instructional Supervisor – Region 9, both point to the Citibank initiative as pivotal in provoking sustained discussion of what it means to be a leader.

Nancy recalls, "During its first year, Citibank Fellows (principals from around the country who came to Providence in the summer to become part of a learning community) taught for a month at Brown Summer High School. Principals selected to be Thompson Fellows attended the program for a week and provided a typical hierarchical model of top-down observations. Feedback led to serious changes the following summer during my term as a Thompson Fellow. There was a conscious effort to make the program more amenable to all involved. A more laissez-faire philosophy was in place. Teachers and principals were paired to co-teach in a democratic fashion. Tensions simmered, then erupted, as inherent flaws surfaced. The principals were still in residence for only one week, in contrast to the teachers who were there for several weeks. The design of the program continued to promote the notion that principals were the experts in the instructional process. And, in keeping with the hierarchical underpinnings, principals stayed in air-conditioned hotel rooms during their one-week residency, while teachers lived in dormitories.

Nancy Mohr and Alan Dichter

"All of this led, however, to powerful new learning. We accepted that school leaders play different roles in schools. We began to ask how we could be genuinely useful. We saw that effective facilitation could elevate conversations within a school community. Leaders who are skilled facilitators stimulate intellectual engagement."

Alan agrees. "The work of the Citibank program focused on instructional practice, not organizational change. As we recognized the value that school leaders could add, we began to train individuals in leadership and facilitation strategies. The earliest incarnation of this training was through Critical Friends Groups; however, those of us engaged in leadership development began to ask what the equivalent to looking at student work was for school leaders. We recognized over and over that effective facilitation enhances the dynamic in many settings. Over time, the questions and the learning evolved into concrete standards for facilitators. Building capacity for this work means training people, endorsing their acquisition of skills, and providing support. We teach leaders how to use a variety of protocols to enhance leadership mandates. We have learned that more significant change comes from ongoing support. Our web site (www.nsrfny.org) lists the process for facilitator endorsement."

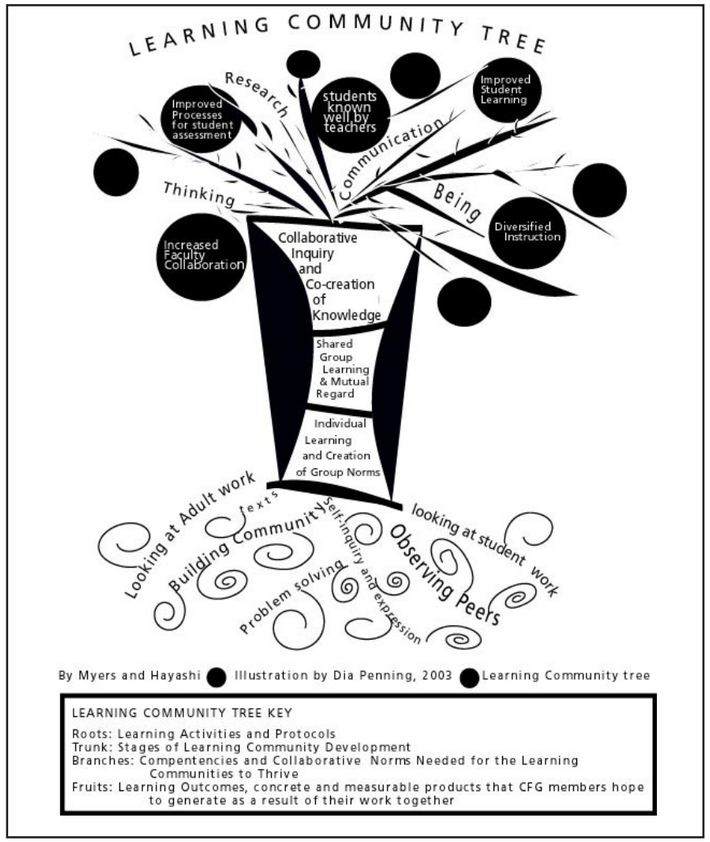
When asked to state their vision for the future of NSRF, Alan and Nancy had similar replies. "Saturation," Alan stated. "The presence of the organization lends credibility to the work. We need to identify potential leaders and facilitators and train them in habits of discussion and reflection."

Nancy agrees with Alan's thoughts about saturation. "Process, process, process—the whole idea of structures to think and to do. We need to forge connections in our work. By involving school leaders in intellectual engagement, we free their minds to think in new ways. We need to value the talk more than the skill level. It is imperative to make everyone an insider in the conversation."

That is happening in the NSRF work in New York City and in the State of Washington. For the past two years, a group of us have been working in Seattle with coaches from schools who have received money from the Gates Foundation. Time is a resource that cannot be shortchanged, and two years is not a long time. But by making the investment to engage in the intellectually rigorous work of forming small learning communities, we provided time and professional development resources that allowed people to engage in new learning, and time to 'chew on' ideas. Consequently, we now have ninety new schools on the trajectory for completing their work. This was previously uncharted territory for NSRF, but it has been deeply satisfying to be part of such a huge paradigm shift.

Facilitation is the intellectual underpinning of democratic practice. It is constantly scary, and always edgy, but it transforms and transcends, and provides mechanisms for using our minds well. ■

Nancy Mohr, Alan Dichter and co-authors Joe and Elizabeth MacDonald wrote The Power of Protocols: an Educator's Guide to Better Practice. *The book is available at www.teacherscollegepress.com. Contact Peggy Silva at <psilva@sprise.com>*



By Myers and Hayashi ● Illustration by Dia Penning, 2003 ● Learning Community tree

one another. It involves the skills of listening, giving feedback, and also self-expression. Without the communication competency, no real dialogue or authentic sharing can happen.

- *Research/Inquiry* has to do with gathering data and new knowledge to deepen and broaden our knowing. It involves the skills of observation and description, data collection and analysis, and contextual reading to broaden our understanding base.

Evolving Trunk is the element of the Learning Community Tree represents the different stages of developmental growth that a learning community may go through over time.

Roots are the different learning activities we can incorporate into our CFGs to help structure our meetings, develop the skills that will nurture our competencies, and generate the fruit, which are our learning outcomes. They include learning from: building community; self-inquiry and expression; texts; problem solving; looking at student and adult work; and observing peers.

We believe that where a group is, based largely on where they are in their internalization of the different learning competencies, *Thinking, Being, Communication and Research,* will affect the choice of Root learning activities as well as the success of a particular tool: protocol, activity or process. For example, is your group ready to handle peer visitation or do they need more practice in observation, description and in giving feedback? Is the Text-based Seminar an appropriate choice for your meeting or does there need to be more practice in thinking skills, particularly in asking questions and considering multiple perspectives? We believe that where the group is as a whole, along with the needs of individual members, affects the successful outcome of a CFG design. The "rings" of growth, starting with an individual member's growth and the creation of group norms, grow toward collaborative inquiry and the co-construction of new knowledge.

Once your group has formed and agreed upon the outcomes or fruits you wish to produce, it is very helpful to consider where your CFG might be along this Evolving Trunk. It is not simply a matter of judgment and standards but rather an acknowledgment of where your group is and what supports are needed for its growth and well–being at this time.

The graphic's descriptors represent some principles we've observed in our practice with Learning Communities that seem generally applicable. At the same time, we've noticed that all members of a group need not be at a particular stage of development for the collective energy of the group as a whole to have made the transition to a higher level. Staying in touch with "critical mass" of any group can be helpful in terms of knowing how to bring individuals on board, or when and how to move forward with certain protocols. ■

Please contact Bill Hayashi at <whayashi@popmail.colum.edu> or Carol Myers at <cmyersindy@aol.com> to continue this conversation.

They began making their thinking public at the Winter Meeting and have already incorporated the feedback they received from other coaches at their Open Space session.

The Trees are Lovely, But Where is the Forest?

Bill Hayashi, Illinois and Carol Myers, Indiana

Bill Hayashi is the director of a program for seniors at Columbia College in downtown Chicago. Carol Myers is a coach and national facilitator based in Indianapolis. Bill and Carol have been working together to uncover the assumptions made by experienced coaches as part of their facilitative process.

Bill Hayashi writes:

This past summer, eleven of us participated enthusiastically in a Critical Friends Group facilitated by Carol Myers, the members of which would eventually become the initiating cadre of coaches for Senior Seminar faculty CFGs. As our last Coaches' Training weekend quickly approached, however, the honeymoon phase of the relationship began to dissipate as the actual truth of the matter began really sinking in: *We would be expected to guide, in a few short weeks, our colleagues and friends through the intricacies of Critical Friends pedagogy and protocols, creating warm and effective faculty learning communities, and then invite our associates to take these same CFG protocols and methods into their classrooms to inspire and empower their students*. That's when the questions and the panic set in: "How exactly do we decide what to put into our CFG meetings? What do we talk about first?" "Do we use readings or just start with norms and community builders? If we do use readings, which protocol do we choose?" "What about warm and cool feedback?" At about the same time, we received yet another heavy binder from Harmony School and NSRF containing yet more new and wonderful protocols, as well as a thick packet of additional readings to instruct and uplift us all.

Overload and meltdown kicked in big time! "How do we structure our first meeting?" "Which protocols do we use, when and why?" "What exactly is the purpose of Critical Friends Groups anyway?" "There are so many trees, I can't really see the forest!" That's when one astute faculty member nailed it quite succinctly: "You know, I feel like I have this toolbox filled with all these wonderful tools, but I'm not exactly sure what we're building nor what each tool is supposed to be used for." That's when I dropped my cool and e-mailed Carol.

Carol Myers writes:

As a facilitator of group work, I have operated with a growing set of assumptions about how collaborative learning groups develop. These assumptions, along with NSRF experiences, continued observations, readings, and a little intuition, guide many of my decisions in supporting the development of collaborative learning communities. When I got Bill's e-mail, and even more directly in a phone conversation with him and several other distraught faculty members, I began to see that these synthesizing assumptions existed primarily in my own head and weren't necessarily clear and apparent to others. (Imagine that!) Bill sensed that I had an understanding of how to go about creating and developing collaborative learning communities but that in our CFG trainings, this was not made explicit. It wasn't enough to have participants within the training experience the "process" of becoming a learning community, if faculty were to be instrumental in assisting others in forming and guiding their own CFGs, they needed to understand the overall structure and processes of how these learning communities come into being. Bill was tenacious in wanting to understand the larger context of learning community development. He wanted to see a conceptual framework and seminar design that would help faculty establish a context for making decisions within their CFGs that would lead to ever evolving and stronger groups. Challenged by Bill in this way, I tried to uncover my assumptions about collaborative learning community development.

The Collaborative Learning Tree map in the illustration represents our thinking to date. We are sharing this graphic and its description for feedback so that we can co-construct an accurate description of the coaching process.

The Collaborative Learning Tree map is a visual representation of some key factors that members might consider when designing their groups and action plans. The Collaborative Learning Tree suggests that the over-riding purpose of CFGs is to create supportive, adult learning communities that in turn are translated into learning communities that support all of our students.

In our visual you'll find the following:

Fruits, which represent the specific learning outcomes and the concrete and measurable products that a CFG hopes to generate as a result of its ongoing meetings. These can include more general outcomes, such as greater collaboration among faculty to strengthen pedagogy or more thoughtful assessment of student work.

Branches are the competencies or collaborative norms that need to be internalized to grow and support the "fruits." We have identified four main branches/competencies needed to produce healthy, tasty fruit (measurable objectives). These are competencies in *Thinking, Being, Communication, and Research*.

- *Thinking/Questioning* has to do with thinking and questioning skills as well as the ability to consider different perspectives and identify differing assumptions.

- *Being/Action* has to do with how we are together: what needs to happen for there to be trust and accountability within the group. The skills we have identified here include openness and receptivity, caring and support, and focus and commitment.
- *Communication* has to do with how well we communicate with

Fires in the Bathroom

A Book Review – Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Fires in the Bathroom is a must-read for everyone concerned about our children and our schools. If you're beginning to plan your program for the fall, read this book! If you're on a committee charged with rewriting the student handbook, read this book! If you're a parent or an administrator trying to understand our children's thoughts and feelings as they experience "school as something done to them, not by them," read this book, and share it with your students and children!

The title of this just published collection of student voices comes from an Oakland teenager, who asks, "What's a teacher to do when she's trying to be nice and they're setting fires in the bathroom?" According to this book, one of the first things we can all do is listen carefully. We can begin by really getting to know our students, their interests, their lives, their hopes and their dreams. We can stop assuming we know them and spend more of our time learning from and with them.

In this book we hear that our kids want to know about us too. They want to know where we went to school, our other job experiences, and why we became teachers. They're hungry for connections between adults and young people, because these connections can make the difference between anonymously drifting through school and really benefiting from the learning experiences that we are so anxious to provide. In the words of one girl, "I been looking for a teacher I can talk to…" Students in the book are quick to point out that they're not looking for phony friendships, they are looking for " that delicate balance between adult authority and guidance mixed with a healthy measure of flexibility." Cushman and her co-authors don't just state all the students' desires, they supply us with user-friendly tools that can help jump-start the process of achieving them. There are sample questionnaires that can be used the first week of school, and there are outlines for contracts that can be used to start conversations about the expectations or norms that will be set for your school or classroom community. There are reflective activities that can be used by individual teachers, or as part of a group. These activities ask us to unpack our expectations for our students — from the high achieving to those that are struggling — but most importantly, the charts and activities ask us for evidence to support our assumptions.

The book goes on to talk about group work, grading, text choice, and the creation of a culture of success, among other things, and it does it all from the student side of the aisle. There are no easy answers in these pages, but there is a wealth of information that can be put to immediate use as we look for the solutions and approaches that apply to our individual situations.

In addition to all of the useful material in the book, there was much that made me smile. In particular, I enjoyed the students' depictions of the student "types" found in typical classrooms. Their list included the "eye-roller" and the "hand-waver," and their descriptions transported me back to my own days as a high school student!

Finally, I appreciated Cushman's description of the thoughtful, collaborative process that was used in formulating the questions and collecting the students' responses. As someone who is focused on student voice, I often feel that I'm missing the mark when I visit schools and sit down with focus groups. Reading this account has pushed my thinking and will alter my approach this week as I revisit my schools. Treat yourself to this powerful new tool! ■

Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students *by Kathleen Cushman and the students of What Kids Can Do, Inc.*
To order, visit your locl bookseller, www.amazon.com, or visit What Kids Can Do at www.whatkidscando.org
Contact Debbie Bambino at <dbambino@earthlink.net>

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An Interactive Website
www.whatkidscando.org

Integral to **WKCD**'s mission is connecting the previously separate fields of school reform, youth development, community development, service learning, and school-to-work. We aim to stand, as well, at the intersection of journalism, research, and advocacy.

WKCD was founded two years ago and its substantial offerings of *Student Work, Youth as Resources,* and *Youth in Media* all speak to the successful realization of its stated mission. Navigating around this site is like diving into a treasure chest of ideas for work with students in our schools, or with our broader communities.

I was especially intrigued by the *"Writing with a Reason"* offerings. This collection of youth publications that serve a public purpose has something that will help you connect with even the most reluctant of your student writers.

But don't just visit the site for ideas, visit with an eye to the future contributions your own students can make. This site's value as a jumping-off point for building the links between students and adults interested in educational reform are without limit! ■

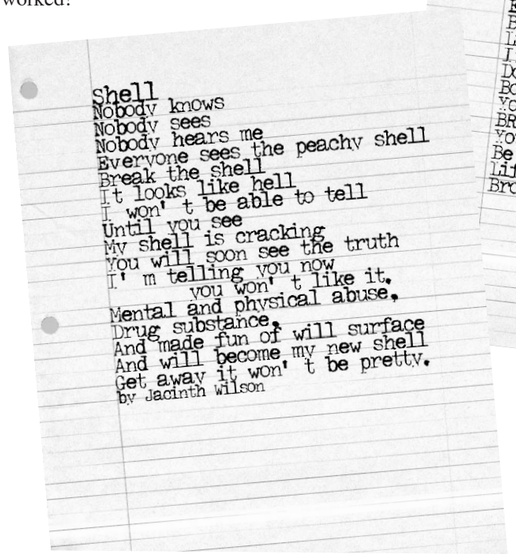
Ridge Arts Actors and the No Child Left Behind Act

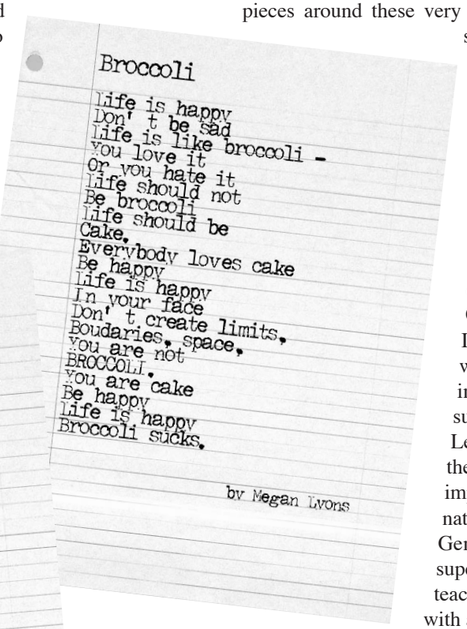
Linda Emm, Florida

"Kids! I don't know what's wrong with these kids today!"
from Bye, Bye Birdie

This song from *Bye Bye Birdie* reflects a question that has been posed from the beginning of time by adults about the children in their lives. You can hear this same question being posed today in teachers' lounges across the country. Maybe one reason the answer is so illusive is that they are asking the wrong people. To get authentic answers, we need to go to the primary sources: the students.

"So what about the students?" has been a question through which I have processed much of the NSRF work I've done over the years. As I was first struggling with probing questions, descriptive statements, and dilemmas, I was also thinking what powerful tools these could be for my students. Last year, we had a major casting crisis after auditions for A Midsummer Night's Dream. We were so torn apart I thought we would have to scrap the whole idea… and I would need to pursue another line of work. While crying to my friend and colleague, Kim Brown, she remarked, "It sounds like you need a consultancy." And she was right. Another fellow coach, Sharon Jones, came up and facilitated a consultancy with me as the presenter and 35 wounded student actors as the group to help me resolve my dilemma. And it worked!


Shell
Nobody knows
Nobody sees
Nobody hears me
Everyone sees the peachy shell
Break the shell
It looks like hell
I won't be able to tell
Until you see
My shell is cracking
You will soon see the truth
I'm telling you now
you won't like it.
Mental and physical abuse.
Drug substance.
And made fun of will surface
And will become my new shell
Get away it won't be pretty.
by Jacinth Wilson

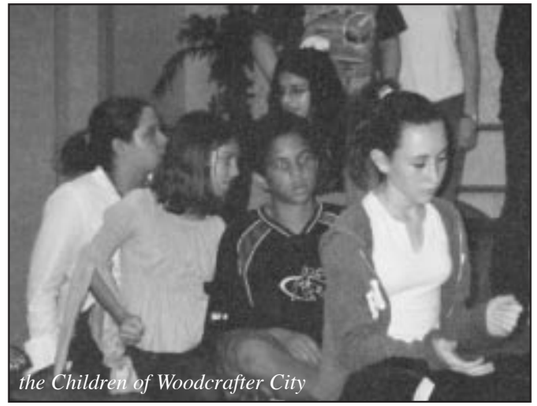

Broccoli
Life is happy
Don't be sad
Life is like broccoli -
You love it
Or you hate it
Life should not
Be broccoli
Life should be
Cake.
Everybody loves cake
Be happy
Life is happy
In your face
Don't create limits.
Boudaries. space.
You are not
BROCCOLI.
You are cake
Be happy
Life is happy
Broccoli sucks.
by Megan Lyons

Returning to Cutler Ridge Middle School after a CFG coaches training in Boston, I became obsessed with creating a collaborative culture with my colleagues. As members of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and avid students of Senge, we were primed for this next step: an actual structure for doing and sustaining our inquiry into our practice and its effect on our students. And, though the process has gone through more phases than the moon, it flourishes still with a new principal, Dr. Elizabeth Alves. To me, there is a direct link between classes and teams where outstanding work is being produced by students and teachers, and the teachers' active participation in a collaborative group. Some teachers begin the day with Connections. Chalk Talks abound in all disciplines. Working on scenes in theatre, students work in companies, where they present their work to each other for feedback along the path to making it public. Reflections on the work (what we were trying to do, what we actually did, why we did it that way, and what we would do differently next time) are the norm.

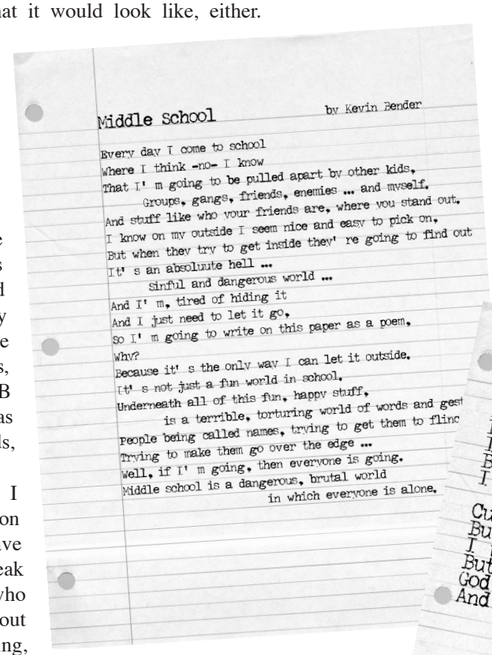
These habits have greatly enhanced the work I do in theatre, especially with my Ridge Arts Acting Company. We rarely do published works. I feel middle school kids have so much to say, and have so few forums to give voice to their thoughts, feelings, concerns, delights, fears, and dreams. We build our performance pieces around these very personal issues, and doing so increases our sense of community. These pieces are truly unique to the group that produces them, because no other group is like them.

Earlier this year we were invited by Gene Thompson-Grove to take part in the closing ceremonies for the ATLAS Communities Principals' Institute. The principals would be spending a week in March looking at data surrounding the "No Child Left Behind" legislation and the question of equity in its implementation. Working with national facilitators (including Gene and Daniel Baron), superintendents, principals, and teachers, they would struggle with all aspects of NCLB – Gene thought that perhaps a fitting close would be to hear from students on the issue. What effect does this whole thing have on students in the classroom?

Introducing the idea to my students was an eye-opening exercise. I wrote "No Child Left Behind" on a chart, and asked them what it meant. They thought it might mean not to forget anyone when you leave. Or if you go on a field trip, everyone has to go…and you can't come back until everyone's on the bus. I explained it was a law, intended to make sure that schools work for everyone in them—not just the easy ones to teach. They thought that was a terrific idea. We continued the discussion through questions like: what would it take to make this true? For them? For their friends? For those students sitting in the back of their classes who seem totally disengaged? And how would we know when all children were succeeding? This sort of stumped them (although they have visions of schools where learning is joyful — in ALL the classrooms, with teachers who remember what it's like to be a kid, and who listen to them).


the Children of Woodcrafter City

I suggested that maybe the people who created the law weren't quite sure what it would look like, either. They think maybe a test might tell them how children are doing... Well! Florida has this "little thing" called the FCAT, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. "Is that why we have FCAT?" My students immediately pounced on that with very vocal protests. The overwhelming view was, if THAT's what NCLB was about, maybe it was a trick! (Their words, not mine.)


Middle School by Kevin Bender
Every day I come to school
Where I think -no- I know
That I'm going to be pulled apart by other kids,
Groups, gangs, friends, enemies … and myself,
And stuff like who your friends are, where you stand out,
I know on my outside I seem nice and easy to pick on,
But when they try to get inside they're going to find out
It's an absolute hell …
Sinful and dangerous world …
And I'm, tired of hiding it
And I just need to let it go,
So I'm going to write on this paper as a poem,
Why?
Because it's the only way I can let it outside,
It's not just a fun world in school,
Underneath all of this fun, happy stuff,
is a terrible, torturing world of words and gest
People being called names, trying to get them to flinc
Trying to make them go over the edge …
Well, if I'm going, then everyone is going.
Middle school is a dangerous, brutal world
in which everyone is alone.

At that point, I offered the information that they would have the opportunity to speak to some principals who were good thinkers about teaching and learning, who would love to hear students' views on this very volatile subject. Did they think they would have something to offer? They were more than willing to seize the challenge.

First they wrote poems about themselves and how they see the world... Megan writes, "Life is like broccoli — you love it or you hate it!" and extols us to "don't set limits, boundaries… be cake!" Jenny proclaims, "I may be black, white, green, purple, orange, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Chinese…but ain't I somebody?" ... Jacinth's words cry out: "Nobody knows, nobody sees, nobody hears me… My shell is cracking, you'll soon know the truth…" Christina's words sing, "I am the sweetest lemon you will ever taste, the saddest person you will ever see smile…" And sweet Kevin shocks with the words: "Middle school is a dangerous, brutal world in which everyone is alone."

I wept. These kids are so willing to offer their souls up for all the world to see. (Talk about going public with one's work!) Clearly, the ATLAS principals would get an honest insight into these kids' world. We had the opening to our presentation.

Now what? How could we create a group performance piece about the impact of NCLB on their school lives, that would be both theatrical and deliver a message we believed?

As fate so often works, Pete Bermudez returned from one of his Cleveland NSRF work sessions with an article titled, "The Woodcrafters' City." Written by Rick Traw, and appearing in the January, 2002, edition of Language Arts Magazine, this is a cautionary tale of assessments gone wild… Set in a city where woodcrafting is passed from generation to generation, the story begins with children sitting with masters as

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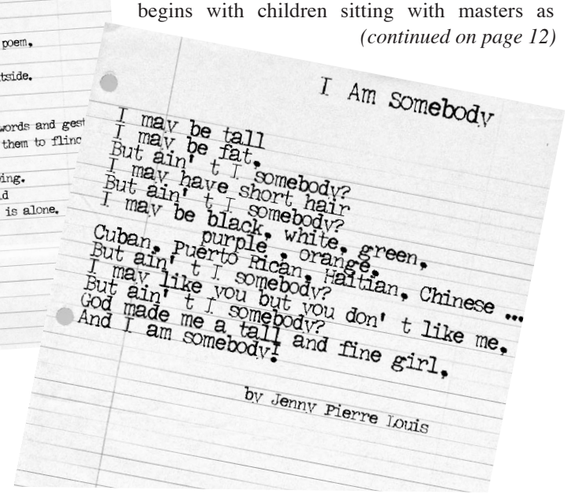
I Am Somebody
I may be tall
I may be fat.
But ain't I somebody?
I may have short hair
But ain't I somebody?
I may be black, white, green,
purple, orange,
Cuban, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Chinese …
But ain't I somebody?
I may like you but you don't like me,
But ain't I somebody?
God made me a tall and fine girl,
And I am somebody!
by Jenny Pierre Louis